



## Workplace Satisfaction Project Work-Life Balance Tools

The complexity of the modern workplace, and the speed with which new demands arrive, means that committed employees can often become overwhelmed with workloads. In an organization where an employee's sense of identity is often significantly attached to their dedication to the NPS and its Mission, this means that work stresses and obligations can easily creep beyond the hours of the workday, and crowd out personal time and personal needs. When work stresses overtake personal means of de-stressing, then work-life balance is negative and the employee is headed for a negative professional experience: high stress, low satisfaction, burnout.

Essentially, work-life balance is about valuing employees by keeping them in positive health – mentally and physically – to be able to do their best work.

It is the responsibility of each employee to ensure that they are maintaining a positive work-life balance, and the responsibility of each supervisor to be aware of imbalances in their employees. Managers who allow employees to push too hard in the name of high productivity are only setting those employees up for a productivity crash down the road, in which they become significantly less effective and engaged.

- The easiest diagnostic tool for work-life balance is to envision an 'energy piggy bank'. Work stresses and personal stresses both remove energy from the bank, while positive work experiences and personal de-stressing activities add energy to the bank. If more energy is added each day on average, there is likely to be a positive work-life balance.
- Supervisors should be made aware, whenever reasonable and appropriate, of significant personal stresses in an employee's life; this will help them gauge whether overall work and personal stress is contributing to a negative work-life balance. While supervisors often have no tools to deal with employee personal stresses, they should not make the mistake of reducing professional expectations below acceptable levels simply to make it easier on the employee. This is where flexibility, discretion, and wise performance management are a supervisor's best tools in helping to strike the healthiest balance for the employee and for the organization.
- Flexibility is a stand-alone tool in optimizing work-life balance, and all employees should value positive flexibility in scheduling and work assignments as a tool for better work-life balance.
- Health and wellness programs are an excellent tool at the office or park level for promoting employee health and overcoming an organizational culture of overwork.
- Supervisors are highly encouraged to be generous with leave approval wherever it can be accommodated. Employees need breaks in order to recharge and to build resiliency to stress. Supervisors who are stingy with leave are doing a direct disservice to the employee and to the agency, in the form of reduced employee effectiveness. The rules are clear: supervisors must approve leave requests unless there is a compelling organizational need to deny it.
- As with all skills, managers should model the behavior they wish to see in their employees. Managers who tell employees to value their personal time, yet work endless hours themselves, are sending a mixed message that reduces trust and confuses dedicated employees.
- Managers should strive to build wise, efficient commitment expectations for their work groups. If for example employee work-life balances are negative in part because coworkers freely call them for work questions on their off time, then it falls to the manager to create a more reasonable expectation (e.g. "Off-duty employees may be contacted for emergency situations, but not for matters that are not time-sensitive".) In cases in which work-life balance is significantly skewed and overwork is culturally embedded, managers may need to actively prohibit

employees from doing non-emergency work on their off time. There is strong dedication to the work, which is positive, and then there is compulsive obligation to the work, which leads to burnout.

- Telework opportunities, when applicable, are recognized as an excellent means of embracing flexibility and growing work-life balance.

